

Chavez prepares Venezuela for 'US-provoked war'

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President Hugo Chavez says Venezuela must be ready to defend itself against what he called the US and Colombia's gearing up for initiating a military conflict.

Chavez who accused Washington and Bogota of planning to stage war against his country announced that thousands of Russian missiles and rocket launchers were being received by Venezuela as the country is preparing for a possible military conflict.

"They are preparing a war against us," Chavez was quoted as saying by the Associated Press. "Preparing is one of the best ways to neutralize it."

"Thousands of missiles are arriving," Chavez said, adding Caracas's growing arsenal includes Russian-made Igla-1S surface-to-air missiles and rocket-propelled grenades.

Chavez added that Russian tanks, including T-72s, will be arriving to strengthen the country's armored divisions.

The Venezuelan leftist leader's charges came after a deal between the United States and Colombia that would let Washington increase its presence at seven Colombian military bases.

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Since 2005, Venezuela has bought more than \$4 billion worth of Russian arms, including 24 Sukhoi fighter jets, dozens of attack helicopters and 100,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles.

In September, Russia opened a \$2.2 billion line of credit for Venezuela to purchase more weapons.

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